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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

Committee on the Development of Trade

Working Party on Facilitation of International Trade Procedures

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

Trade and Development Board

Advisory Services on Trade Documentation

TRADE DOCUMENTATION INFORMATION

NEW ACTIVITIES OF THE ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

(Note by the ECE Secretariat)

1. At its twentieth session, in November 1971, the Committee on the Development of Trade of the Economic Commission for Europe considered the question of the simplificatic of international trade procedures and the proposals for new institutional arrangements put forward in that connexion by the Executive Secretary and by the Group of Experts on the simplification and standardization of external trade documents.

2. The Committee noted that the standardization of external trade documents on the basis of the ECE lay-out key had made considerable progress and was constantly extending both inside and outside the region covered by the Economic Commission for Europe. It took the view, however, that the standardization of documents was only one aspect of the measures designed to facilitate international trade and that there was an urgent need to rationalize trade procedures and adapt them to the needs and possibilities created by the application of modern techniques in transport and communications, in particular automatic data processing and transmission techniques.

3. To attain this objective, the Committee took three decisions assigning new tasks to some of its subsidiary bodies:

(i) The Group of Experts on the Simplification and Standardization of External Trade Documents was transformed into a working party, and its name was changed to the "Working Party on Facilitation of International Trade Procedures"; its main functions are: to co-ordinate international trade facilitation activities; to follow up the development of procedures involved in international transactions and transport operations with a view to simplifying and harmonizing them; to disseminate information on the subject; to seek a common methodology for solving facilitation problems; to promote the standardization of external trade documents in accordance with the ECE lay-out key - including documents designed for use in computer and other automated systems; to

develop a standard international trade terminology and a uniform system of codes for use in systems for the transmission and processing of trade data; and to promote, in consultation with the International Telecommunication Union, appropriate electronic data transmission systems for use in international trade.

(ii) An information exchange system was set up under the auspices of the Working Party in which interested States and international organizations will participate. The main purpose of the system, which will take the form of the distribution of a quarterly information bulletin giving, by category, brief summaries of developments relating to international trade facilitation will be to co-ordinate efforts and to avoid wasteful duplication.*/

(iii) Finally, a Group of Experts on Automatic Data Processing and Coding has been set up under the auspices of the Working Party. The Group of Experts will meet at the beginning of 1972 to draw up its programme of work and to commence its studies. Its purpose is to facilitate the application of automated data processing and data transmission methods by co-ordinating work designed to establish a uniform system of codes and uniform presentation of trade information.

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*/ This system, which will come into operation in 1972, will be separate from the publication of the present report series. Whereas the latter provides complete reports, when the objectives have been attained, the new system will merely give brief abstracts of the procedures undertaken to attain certain objectives.